

EXHIBIT W

From: Tracy Deebs <tracydeebs@gmail.com>

To: Elizabeth Pelletier <liz@entangledpublishing.com>

Subject: Re: Chapter 77

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Here you go!

On Sat, Oct 16, 2021 at 12:00 AM Elizabeth Pelletier <liz@entangledpublishing.com> wrote:

This is pretty damn close to perfect. I don't want you to change anything. JUST make it a wee bit longer in her internal dialogue. I need everything else setup this way b/c I'm fixing some pacing issues in the gargoyle court with it as well as layering in Grace and Hudson slowly falling apart—and Hudson being the one who is mentally letting go. The reader can't know it yet though, just on a re-read, so his words and actions are just the right amount. We just need her reaction beat to what he says to have more emotion. You with me?

Thanks so much!

Liz

Liz Pelletier, CEO & Publisher (she/her)

Entangled Publishing, LLC

www.entangledpublishing.com

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Chapter 77

Chastain is standing in the training area now, watching me. Because of course he is. Determined not to get on his bad side any more than I already have, I hustle toward him. And then pull up short when he slams a broadsword into my hand.

Or at least I think it's a broadsword. I'm not exactly up on my medieval weaponry, but the thing in my hand seems like that's what it should be called. It's got a decorative hilt inlaid with beautiful semi-precious stones and a thick, double-edged blade that is pretty close to three feet long and looks dangerous as hell.

The thing also weighs about eight million pounds. Okay, more like five or six, but the idea of swinging it—let alone lifting it over my head—definitely gives me pause. So I guess if this isn't a broadsword, I think it should be. And also, never want to actually hold one if it's bigger than this.

Still, I'm not about to ask Chastain to tell me more about the weapon—or express my doubts that I can actually fight with it. I've told him we're here to help train the Gargoyle Army. I need to act like I can how to do that.

I swear, one of these days there's going to be some situation in this world where I don't feel like I have to fake it 'til I make it. But today is very definitely not that situation.

I rest the heavy sword on my shoulder and wander over to a shaded area where Hudson is seated, his legs stretched out in front of him, a copy of *Medea* in his hands. I should have known he would have already found the library in this place—and a tragedy to read.

"That's a good look for you," Hudson says, the heat from our kiss earlier still burning in his gaze. "Very sexy."

I roll my eyes. "What is it about a woman with a weapon that turns guys on?"

"Many, many things," he answers with a wicked glint in his eyes. "Some of which I would be more than happy to show you when we're done training."

"I'll keep that in mind," I answer with an amused shake of my head. I start to step back, to head over to the training circles and try to figure out what I'm supposed to do with this thing, when Hudson puts a hand on my elbow.

"Hey." The laughter fades from his eyes, and he leans closer so that I can hear him when he lowers his voice to little more than a whisper. "You belong here."

The words hit me harder than I expect them to—probably because they go to the heart of the feelings I’ve been having all day—and I rear back. “What does that mean?” I ask, pulling my elbow from his light grip.

“I just thought you might need to hear it.” He leans down now, so that his lips are almost brushing my ear when he continues, “I know it doesn’t feel like it right now, but you don’t need to be the strongest or fastest or most badass to be a great ruler, Grace. You just have to care about their happiness more than your own.”

I stare at the ground, shuffling my feet, shame twisting in my stomach. “Like how I would sacrifice them all to save you?”

“You wouldn’t,” he says, and he sounds so certain I lift my gaze to meet his.

“How do you know that?” I whisper.

He shrugs, leaning back and pulling open his book again before answering. “Because you would never be as selfish as I would.”

I know he didn’t mean his words to be a knife to my chest, but my heart stutters nonetheless. Does he really believe I wouldn’t sacrifice the *world* to save him? “I would,” I whisper, and he looks back up at me, nothing but love and tenderness in his gaze.

“No, you wouldn’t, Grace. And it’s one of the reasons I love you so damn much.” He smiles. “You’re so impossibly strong. You will always sacrifice your own happiness for others, and *that* is what is going to make you an amazing ruler.” He waves a hand towards the practice field. “Now get out there and show them what you can do.”

I follow his directions and walk toward the field because I can’t be late, not with Chastain riding me as hard as he has been. But that doesn’t mean I’m done with this conversation, because I’m not. Not by a long shot.

How can Hudson think for even one second that I wouldn’t sacrifice anything—sacrifice everything—to save him? He’s my mate and my best friend all wrapped up into one and I can’t imagine a day without him, let alone a lifetime. I would give up the crown in a second to save him, would give up my *life* to save him, and he thinks I would just let him die?

No, this conversation isn’t over. I need to know what I’ve done to make him believe such a thing. And what I can do to make him understand just how much I love and need him.

I’m not done with this conversation. Not by a long shot. But this is neither the time nor the place to debate the ridiculousness of my mate’s words. I can’t even imagine a day without

~~him, much less a lifetime, silly boy. Lost in thought, I turn and walk back towards the training area.~~

~~Once I get to the training area, Chastain is ordering orders~~ a younger gargoyle to take the field opposite me, jeering he should take it easy on me. ~~The mockery makes all the gargoyles who have gathered to watch laugh, making the other gargoyles gathered to spectate laugh,~~ and I know I should care. I should care that he refuses to give me an ounce of respect. ~~Should c~~Care that he seems as dismissive of me as ~~he is of~~ Cyrus.

But I don't.

All I can think about is the realization that Hudson was right. Ruling has nothing to do with how strong or ~~how~~ fast you are.

~~Ruling is It's about sacrifice, about loss. loss.~~

~~It's a terrifying thought considering no matter what happens—no matter what I do-- Because no matter what happens,~~ someone is going to lose in five days. ~~and And worse, the choice of I'm terrified the choice of~~ who suffers the most is going to be entirely mine.